1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Silwa

where. In default of compliance or in the case of the continued absence of the child, its parents or guardian are to be notified, and are liable to fine or imprisonment.

These were the main laws governing the compulsory school in Egypt until 1948, and the village school was on a half-day basis up to that year, boys attending school in the morning, followed by the girls in the afternoon.[1] There are usually four classes in the school building and three other rooms, one for the staff and two for stores. The number of school-children during the year 1950–51 was 138 in the four classes. According to the official records the numbers of children of the compulsory school age for the last seven years were:

TABLE VI

Children of the compulsory school age in Silwa (1944–51)

Year	*Total*	*Boys*	*Girls*
1944	154	77	87
1945	98	50	48
1946	98	45	53
1947	97	48	49
1948	131	60	71
1949	47	26	21
1950	61	38	23
1951	77	51	26[2]

The school, however, has only places for 150 children of all ages, and thus there is scope for some parents to compete for appeal either to the Omda or the headmaster at the beginning of the year to exempt their children from schooling or to withdraw them on grounds of lack of space.

As to the staff, the school has between three and four teachers; two of them at present are from the village itself, and the teachers are either the products of al-Azhar, the theological University, or the Elementary Training College (four to five years' course). The main requirement for entrance to the latter at the age of fourteen is the memorization of half

[1] It is indicative of the male-female ethos that boys should attend school first, and even at present when the school is full, and the classes are mixed, the boys sit in the front, with the girls at the back of the class. This reflects the different sex norm guiding the behaviour of the villagers in comparison with mixed education in the modern Egyptian Universities where, for instance, girl students sit in the front and the male students sit behind them, yet there is no real mixing in the lecture rooms. The front rows are normally reserved for girls, and the general tendency is for the girls to keep to these rows.

[2] The number of children eligible for compulsory school in 1949, 1950 and 1951 is comparatively low because of the very high death rate amongst both children and adults between 1941 and 1943 as a result of the malaria epidemic.

1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Silwa

the Koran at least, and the passing of an entrance examination in Arabic, arithmetic and drawing.

Yet compulsory education in Silwa, and probably in the rest of the country, has not been fully accepted by the rural people, and on the whole has been a failure, both quantitatively and qualitatively. I have not met any one of the villagers in Silwa who was enthusiastic about the educational role of the compulsory school. Although the compulsory school teaches parts of the Koran and includes religious instruction in its curriculum, the villagers do not think that it has the proper religious atmosphere which the Kuttab on the other hand provides. In spite of the fact that the teachers themselves are respected by the villagers, the latter quite often refer to the school as 'that place where they teach "wazan" ', the first word in the reader. In the emotional overtone of ridicule implied in the word 'wazan' the villagers themselves have diagnosed the main weakness of the compulsory school which confines itself to the teaching of the three R's—religious instruction, drawing and poems and songs in the classical Arabic (nasheed). Even for the children themselves, the compulsory school seems somewhat exotic, being the place where they learn drawing and singing. On the whole, the acceptance of school as a contributor to the village life has been vitiated by limiting its scope to abolishing illiteracy, and by the irrelevance of its aims and methods to the actual life of the villagers.

It is not surprising, then, that the villagers consider the sending of their children to the elementary school as a waste of time, and try by every means to evade attendance. I have seen quite a few names on the list of those eligible for compulsory schooling after which the village Omda or Sheikhs have signed a declaration that a particular child has left the village for an unknown place. The problem of regular attendance is, of course, a baffling one, both for the teaching staff who keep notifying the parents, as well as the police courts.[1] The dilemma of the two teachers from the village is most acute since they usually find themselves torn between their official duty and their obligations in handling cases of absenteeism from the school. This, in fact, creates a lot of friction between the school teachers and the villagers. Parents come to the school trying to make excuses for their children's absence, or to withdraw them from it for the rest of the day for a pressing task as if the children were in the Kuttab. It is interesting to note here that according to the school records the attendance has certainly improved in the village school since the provision of a midday meal for the school children, a scheme which started in 1942 and was in operation in Silwa in 1947. At present, it is applied throughout all the compulsory schools in the country.[2]

[1] The statistics of the Elementary Education Department show that in 1939–40 the average attendance in compulsory schools in the whole country was about 60 per cent of the total registered numbers (Al-Kabbani, op. cit., p. 33). In the village, absence from school, or from the Kuttab, is extremely high during weeks of irrigation and time of harvest when there is much work to be done in the fields.

[2] The following is a list of the items of food provided to a child per week: